

Message Text

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43

ACTION ARA-20

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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INFO GOV PANCANAL

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 0006

DEPT: PASS TO USIA: IOR/M

E O 11652: GDS

TAGS: PN PFOR

SUBJ: RESUMPTION OF CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS: RE-ACTION
TO PROPOSAL ON FRANCE FIELDS

SUMMARY: OFFICIAL REACTION TO PRESIDENT NIXON'S INTENTION TO SEEK LEGISLATION TO RETURN OLD AND NEW FRANCE FIELDS TO PANAMA HAS BEEN FAVORABLE. PRESS COVERAGE ALSO HAS BEEN EXTENSIVE AND POSITIVE.

1. PRESIDENT NIXON'S PROPOSAL TO SEEK LEGISLATION TO RETURN NEW AND OLD FRANCE FIELD TO PANAMANIAN JURISDICTION HAS STRUCK POSITIVE CHORD IN PANAMA. EMBASSY SOURCE TOLD EMBOFF JANUARY 1 THAT FOREIGN MINISTER, IN BRIEFING OF BUSINESSMEN DECEMBER 31, CHARACTERIZED THE PREIDENT'S PROPOSAL AS EVIDENCE OF POSITIVE ATTITUDE IN US TOWARD PANAMA.

2. FOREIGN MINISTER ALSO MADE PUBLIC STATEMENT WHICH APPEARED IN NEWSPAPERS SUNDAY, DECEMBER 30 IN WHICH HE SAID PRESIDENT NIXON WAS PROPOSING TO CONGRESS LEGISLATION TO MODERNIZE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE US AND PANAMA WITH RESPECT
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TO THAT PART OF PANAMANIAN TERRITORY KNOWN AS THE CANAL ZONE. TACK ALSO SAID THE MEASURES HAD BEEN RECOMMENDED TO THE

PRESIDENT BY AMBASSADOR BUNKER AND THAT BUNKER HAD INFORMED TACK OF HIS INTENTION TO MAKE THE RECOMMENDATIONS DURING HIS VISIT TO PANAMA. THE MEASURES WERE "STRICTLY UNILATERAL" AND APPEARED TO BE INTENDED TO "SIGNAL...A NEW ATTITUDE TOWARDS PANAMA..." THE FUNDAMENTAL THING FOR PANAMA, TACK EMPHASIZED IS "A NEW TREATY ON THE PANAMA CANAL."

3. AMBASSADOR GONZALEZ REVILLA TOLD EMBOFF JANUARY 1 THAT GOP REACTION WAS "POSITIVE, BUT NOT EUPHORIC."

4. NEWSPAPERS SATURDAY DECEMBER 29 GAVE HEADLINE TREATMENT TO USIS WIRELESS AND UPI STORIES OF THE PREIDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENT FROM SAN CLEMENTE. MATUTINO STORY WAS ACCOMPANIED BY AERIAL PHOTO OF THE AIRFIELDS SHOWING THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO COLON FREE ZONE. SUBJECT REMAINED ON FIRST PAGES OF LOCAL PAPERS FOR 3 DAYS.

5. ON DECEMBER 31 AN ARTICLE ON PANAMA'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 1973 WRITTEN BY EFE CORRESPONDENT ZOILO G. MARTINEZ DE VEGA APPEARED IN MATUTINO AND CONTAINED FAVORABLE COMMENTS CONCERNING BUNKER'S VISIT. VEGA WROTE THAT DURING THE VISIT AGREEMENT WAS "PRACTICALLY CONCLUDED" ON A SET OF PRINCIPLES WHICH CONSTITUTE THE SKELETON OF A NEW TREATY. THIS IS THE ONLY PUBLIC MENTION OF THE EXISTENCE OF A SET OF PRINCIPLES FOR THE NEW TREATY THAT HAS SURFACED. COMMENT: THE TIMING OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF US INTENTION TO SEEK LEGISLATION TO RETURN THE AIRFIELDS WAS PROPITIOUS AND HAS SERVED TO MAINTAIN THE FAVORABLE CLIMATE FOR NEGOTIATIONS. GOP OFFICIALS EXPECT AMBASSADOR BUNKER TO VISIT PANAMA PRIOR TO JANUARY 9 AND THEREFORE APPEAR CONFIDENT OF KEEPING THE SITUATION CALM ON THAT DATE.
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